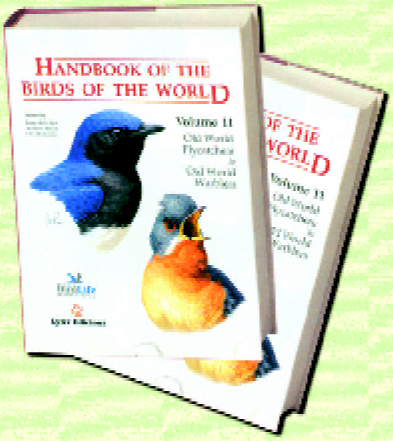
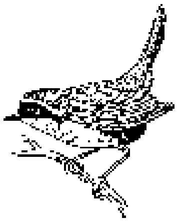
Newsletter for Birdwatchers

Vol. 47 No. 4 July - August 2007


HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF THE WORLD
Volume 11
Old World Flycatchers to Old World Warblers
Lynx Edicions

Vol. 47 No. 4 July - August 2007



Editorial Board

Dr. A.M.K. Bharos
Harish R. Bhat
Dr. S.P. Bhatnagar
Dr. A.K. Chakravarthy
Dr. Ranjan Kumar Das
Dr. S. Devasahayam
B.S. Kulkarni
Arvind Mishra
Dr. Geeta S. Padate
Prof. S. Rangaswami
K. Mrutumjaya Rao
A.N. Yellappa Reddy
Dr. Rajiv Saxena
Dr. A.B. Shanbhag
Arunayan Sharma
S. Sridhar
Dr. Abraham Verghese, FRES (London)

Publisher : S. Sridhar

CONTENTS

- **Note from the Publisher**
  - ☐ HBW Volume 11 - Providing unprecedented insight into the lives of Flycatchers and Warblers
- **Articles**
  - ☐ Excerpts from the Handbook of the Birds of the World (HBW). Volume 11. Old World Flycatchers to Old World Warblers
  - ☐ Roosting behaviour of White-bellied Tree Pie (*Dendrocitta leucogastra*), by S. Babu and E. A. Jayson.
- **Correspondence**
  - ☐ Largest assemblage of Asian Openbills Anastomus oscitans in a single tree in the Kulik Bird Sanctuary, North Dinajpur district, West Bengal, India. by Arunayan Sharma
  - ☐ Unusual mating behaviour and reversal of roles in Purple-rumped Sunbirds *(Nectarinia zeylonica),* by Raju Kasambe
  - ☐ Pied Myna *(Sturnus Contra)* Enters Malwa, by D.N. Misraraj

---

Note from the Publisher

Dear fellow Birdwatchers,

HBW Volume 11

Providing unprecedented insight into the lives of Flycatchers and Warblers.

Sharing of information and knowledge is no doubt necessary in unlocking the mysteries of the avian world. I had the privilege of glancing through the 11th Volume of the Handbook of the Birds of the World, which is packed with scholarly information and provides unprecedented insight into the secret lives of Old World Flycatchers and Old World Warblers.

A year of birding is a long time for many of us and five decades of it could be a whole generation, judging by the contribution of the likes of S. J. Skead, who has kept meticulous notes from 50 years of patient observation of birds in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. In this manner, several birders have made landmark discoveries and have provided new maturity to ornithology through spellbinding narratives, vibrant pictures, lifelike paintings, eye-catching diagrams and coherent flow-charts in this volume.There are catchwords that resonate with coherence and wisdom. This Volume is a fine example of decades of devotion of the contributors, who have demonstrated that renewed field studies can unearth voluminous avian information, hitherto remaining latent. Besides, there are numerous examples of new and creative ways in which we can undertake ornithological explorations. Thus, the HBW volumes are indeed a passport for the beginner to get introduced to birds and bound to motivate him into closer and critical study.

It must be conceded that there has been complete consistency in the illustrations that have comprehensively showcased the eight families (from Old World Flycatchers to Old World Warblers). As noteworthy and exceptional as the illustrations are the species accounts, which are also exhaustively dealt genus-wise, with common names of the species, taxonomy, subspecies, distribution maps and descriptive notes. In dealing with the classifications, different taxonomists have taken doctrinally different stands on account of lack of differentiating characters. Yet the HBW authors have endeavored to clear the ambiguities in an intelligible style and fair judgement. A few Indians have also contributed their exceptional photographs which quite live up to the expectations of international standards.

Avian researchers nowadays have an overwhelming array of themes to choose from and for that reason; the theme for our National Seminar held at Bangalore in 2005 was "New Initiatives for Bird Conservation". Consequently, there is no compulsion to study a particular aspect of Class Aves. We ought to look at various other aspects of birds also and continue to build shared perceptions of our complementary strengths.

Ultimately, the hope is to influence the decision makers to comprehend the terrible impacts, visualize the grim portents and cataclysmic consequences on the fragile environment, before sanctioning shortsighted developmental schemes.

Thanking you,
Yours in bird conservation,
S. Sridhar, Publisher, *NLBW.*

Material for publication should be sent
(in duplicate) by post or courier to :
Newsletter for Birdwatchers
No 10, Sirur Park B Street, Seshadripuram,
Bangalore 560 020, India.
along with a soft copy (in MS Word format only) via
E-mail to <navbarat@gmail.com>

Excerpts from the Handbook of the Birds of the World (HBW) Volume 11. Old World Flycatchers to Old World Warblers.

Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott and **David Christie,** Published by Lynx Edisions, Barcelona,

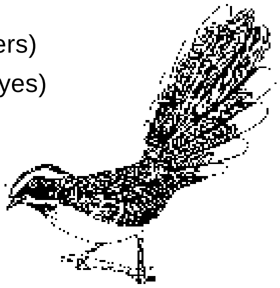
Excerpts and Highlights by S. Sridhar, Publisher, NLBW

The Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 11, (Old World Flycatchers to Old World Warblers) is a masterpiece that every passionate birdwatcher will be infatuated with or dying to possess.

The ardent expectation is that the HBW will not only provide the crucial platform to young enthusiastic birders, but also offer hundreds of avenues and opportunities to both amateur and advanced researchers, who are keen to learn from the world around them.

Volume 11 deals with the following families: -

Musicicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)
Platysteiridae (Batises and White-eyes)
Rhipiduridae (Fantails)
Monarchidae (Monarch-flycatchers)
Regulidae (Kinglets and Firecrests)
Polioptilidae (Gnatcatchers)
Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and allies)
Sylviidae (Old World Warblers)



Technical details of the volume are as follows:-

310 x 240 mm, 800 pages, 55 colour plates, 343 photographs, 733 distributional maps, c. 6000 bibliographical references

The Volume 11 of the Handbook of the Birds of the World, covers Old World Flycatchers to Old World Warblers, Edited by Del Josep Hoyo, Elliott, A. & Christie, D.A. and published by Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. A BirdLife International venture. In all 26 authors have contributed the text and 12 artists have provided the colour plates.

The preface titled "Canaries in a Collapsing Mine" is penned by Paul R Ehrlich, Centre for Conservation Biology, Stanford University. According to Ehrlich; "more is known about the state of Earth's avifauna by scientists and the general public than about any comparable taxonomic group. The reason is clear: the beauty, ubiquity, and ease of study of bird has long attracted the attention of amateur naturalists, biological scientists and the general public, making the birds the most familiar class of organisms for most people. All this was highlighted by the recent excitement and extensive media coverage of the discovery that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) was not extinct. Can you imagine, for example, an equivalent fuss being made if say, the extinct San Francisco satyrine butterfly (*Cercyonis sthenele*) was once again found in the city?"

A second critical message implicit in the comprehensive preface is that "what *is* known about the status of birds is deeply frightening. As anthropogenic climate change – which may eventually prove catastrophic – has become manifest, birds are the most charismatic organisms showing clear shifts in their distributions in response. In this case, birds are clearly serving a function analogous to the canaries that early coal miners took underground with them. Canaries were early warning system for the miners, as they showed signs of distress (difficulty in breathing) or even keeled over when poisonous methane was in the air. Other animals are showing global range changes similar to birds, but those changes are more difficult to detect because society pays much less attention to other fauna. Thus, birds as a group are warning people of potentially dangerous changes in their environment."

Ehrlich sums up as follows: - "Our current predicament is unlikely to change until enough human beings realize that their own fates are intertwined with those of the feathered dinosaurs, and begin to make dramatic changes in the distribution of power in the world and in the priorities of world leaders. Birds are telling us that we are darkening our own futures and the prospects of our descendants. It is high time we listened to them."

Cagan Hakki Sekercioglu, of the Stanford University, Department of Biological Sciences, Center for Conservation Biology, Stanford, CA, USA, has provided the thought provoking Foreword, under the subheadings; 'Ecological Significance of Bird Populations' and 'Predation and Pest Control' which runs to some 37 pages.

The Editors Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott, and David Christie in their 'Introduction to Volume 11 and acknowledgments' have averred that "HBW continues to aim at being as up to date as possible in terms of the information provided, and to this end we try to give adequate coverage to all relevant new proposals that reach the attention of authors or editors in time to negotiate all the practicabilities of their inclusion".

"In the present volume, we have one slightly awkward case, namely that of *Seicercus soror.* We were encouraged to use the recently suggested English name that celebrates one of its describers: Alström's Warbler. However, Per Alström, on discovering this, remarked that he was flattered but embarrassed, particularly because, as he is the author of that particular species account in HBW, he might be thought to have coined this name himself in his own honour! We should like to make it quite clear that the truth is the opposite. Whether this particular English name eventually prevails or not, we feel that nobody will deny that Per merits such an honour, particularly in view of his extensive work with this group."

"The HBW publishers have recently unveiled a free-access internet Global Index for the Handbook series on the projects' website www.hbw.com, which will be useful for ornithologists. In this Global Index , all of the scientific names of each order, family, genus, species, and subspecies covered to date in the HBW series are included, both those names that are accepted and their synonyms and other names mentioned in the taxonomy sections of the texts. Searches can also be conducted using English names, including the names listed under the heading "Other common names" in the texts, which will be helpful tool for researchers to find just what they are looking for within the HBW series."

The eight families are individually dealt under the following sub-headings:- Systematics, Morphological Aspects, Habitat, General Habits, Voice, Food and Feeding, Breeding, Movements, Relationship with Man, and Status & Conservation. This is followed by Species Accounts wherein species-wise accounts are described in detail under the respective genus.

The following excerpts and passages from the volume provide a birds eye-view and insights into the eight families contained therein.

Systematics:

The taxonomy of the Sylviidae is characterized by confusion, with a long and turbulent history of systematic classification and subsequent changes, and this has continued to the present day. This confusion is due essentially to a lack of differentiating characters. The family definition was based on very general phenotypical characters, many of which are apparently plesiomorphic, having been retained from ancestors which the sylviids had common with other avian families, and are not diagnostic. There is not a single uniquely derived character in the Sylviidae which characterizes the family. Traditional taxonomic arrangements relied on similarities in plumage, morphology and ecology. These traits could, however, be subject to misinterpretation and could be the result of convergent adaptations to, for example, similar habitats or behavioral traits such as foraging or migration. Such characters as a thin, pointed bill with bristles at the base have evolved convergently in many insectivorous passerines as an adaptation to similar prey. Consequently, classification and the determining of the phylogenic relationships of the Sylviidae are currently under heavy reconsideration and are much debated in the light of recent molecular-genetic data. In contrast to morphological characters, molecular information derived from marker genes reduces problems of character identification and convergence in taxonomic studies. In recent years, dramatic advances in knowledge of the evolutionary relationships of birds have led to numerous revisions in classification, and this seems certain to continue. Molecular data can help resolve problems in phylogeny and taxonomy, but they cannot do so entirely. Much research is still to be conducted over the coming years, making particular use of the developing field of molecular genetics.

According to the editors, although differences among the groups included in the family Musicapidae (old world Flycatchers), which has some 18 genera, 116 species and 317 taxa, distributed in Europe, Africa and Asia, seemed small in some instances for the experts, particularly in the case of many species of the old world tropics, lumping them all in one massive family obscures the differences that do exist and, results in an unwieldy collection of taxa. The authors have argued that taxonomically speaking, one of the most controversial members of the family, the Herero Chat-flycatcher of western Namibia and Angola, was often included with the chats in the Turdidae family on the basis of feather structure, anatomy, voice and habits, but it resembles Bradorins flycatcher in nest structure, nest-site and eggs, as well as the begging calls of nestlings. For this reason some experts had concluded in 1970, that the taxonomic separation of chats and flycatchers at family level was unrealistic. Indeed, the fact that this species has feathers associated with both chats and flycatchers has been used to argue against the separation of these groups at the family level. Recent DNA work suggests that the species may be closer to the flycatchers, however so for the present the authors have tentatively placed it in Muscicapidae.

Incidentally way back in 1910, E.J.O. Hartert had united Turdidae, Timaliidae, Sylviidae and Monorchidae in an expanded family Musicapidae, and the authors feel this arrangement seems to be influencing the current taxonomic thinking.

Therefore, as far as addressing the challenges of classification, sincere efforts have been made to entirely set at rest the controversies in the systematics part. Several unanswered questions relating to status, classification and distribution have been dealt intelligibly. The core issue of whether a particular warbler belongs to one family or the other is persuasively debated with facts and figures in this part.

Morphological Aspects:

The authors have handled the morphological aspects very professionally. For example the monarch-flycatcher family as presently defined, is a diverse group of small, slim bodied, generally active arboreal birds many of which are handsomely plumaged. Its members range in size from the warbler like Little Yellow Flycatcher (*Erythrocerus* *holochlorus)*, some 9 cm in total length and 5-7 grams in weight, to the streamer tailed male Asian Paradise-flycatcher, which has a total length, including greatly elongated central feathers of up to at least 50 cm and a weight of 18-22 grams. The name "monarch" is usually applied to members of the oriental genus Hypothymis, the Australasian genera *Monarcha* and *Arses*, the Pacific genera *Pomarea, Mayornis, Neolalage* and *Metabolus*, and some times the Oriental *Philentoma.*

Two large poorly known species of humid forests in South-east Asia and the Sundaic sub region occupy the genus *Philentoma.* These have long been grouped to a superficial similarity to the paradise-flycatchers, but the balance of evidence suggests that their origins lie elsewhere. Genetic analyses placed the group within the Madagascan vangas (Vangidae) but this seems unlikely on biogeographical grounds. Both species are largely dull blue in colour, with mid-length tails, stout bills and red eyes.

Plumage coloration of *Terpsiphone* species is generally rufous, grey, white or black, and the under parts often contrast with the upperparts. The sexes are dimorphic, and in a few species the male is variable in colour and pattern. Variants are usually rufous or white, with intermediaries as in Asian Paradise-flycatcher. These variants are often referred to as "morphs" or "phases", but such terms are inappropriate in these instances. It has been pointed out that, because a range of variants and intermediates may occur at any one locality, it is not true polymorphism that is involved, but rather plumage variability.

Habitat:

Habitats are described in a lucid manner. For example, Cisticola warblers occupy a wide range of habitats, from grasslands and arid scrublands to marshes and climax rainforests. However habitat use is not uniform across the family. The most widespread species of the family the Zitting Cisticola, is atypical in exhibiting a broad range of habitats across its distribution, from tall, moist grassland to arid savanna, and from reedy marshes to *Salicornia* salt marsh. Moreau regarded it as "the most remarkable small bird in the world", for the way in which it has managed to occupy a prodigious range, despite being sedentary in most areas. Given this species' structural and behavioral uniformity across vast distances, he considered it inevitable that it has, on an evolutionary time scale, only very recently colonized much of its range. Part of the reason for its success is its broad habitat tolerance, and the ability to adapt breeding and molting schedules to accommodate different habitat regimes. The Zitting Cisticola has adapted to agricultural landscapes, which doubtless has aided its recent spread to southern Europe and allowed it to expand its range into arid areas in southern Africa. Nevertheless, it does demonstrate habitat preferences. After a severe winter had caused local extinctions of the species in parts of northern Spain, recolonizing individuals constantly preferred marsh habitats; Zetting Cisticolas did not start to display in adjacent farmland until the marshes were almost fully occupied by territorial individuals.

Cisticolids can be seen at a wide range of altitudes, from sea level to high up in mountains, reaching above 4000m in the highlands of north–east Africa and at least 3100m in Asia, some exhibiting high altitudinal tolerances, exceeding 3000m. But many tend to favour either high or low elevations.

General habits:

Most of the Musicapidae do not advertise their presence by loud calling or great activity, and are generally rather quite, unobtrusive birds. Most members of the family are active throughout the day, and it is not unusual to see open-habitat species, perched on prominent lookout posts on high branches and overhead wires for hours at a time, especially in cooler weather. Many species exhibit more intensive foraging activity early in the morning, with less during the hotter middle part of the day and an increase again in the afternoon. The pattern is well known for species of all habitats, even for forest-dwellers. Virtually nothing is known about the roosting behavior of flycatchers. The only information on record is that females in the genera *Ficedula* and *Muscicapa* roost on the nest during the laying period. The flycatchers are known to bathe by standing in shallow water, and also recorded bathing in rain or wet foliage, and plunge bathing. Preening always follows botching and Muscicapids perform head-scratching by the indirect method, with the foot brought up over the lowered wing. Very few members of this family have been observed to indulge in allopreening.

In terms of minimizing predation risk and maximizing foraging efficiency and other uses of a location's resources, it is obviously of advantage, if an individual bird can return to places where it knows the location of good foraging spots, nest-sites, roosting sites and shelters to which to retreat when danger threatens. It also makes sense that, once a good wintering site has been found, a migratory bird should remain there throughout the season if possible. It is not surprising, therefore, than many birds have been shown to be faithful to breeding sites and to wintering areas, often for long periods, and examples abound of long-distance migrants returning in successive years to exactly the same place, and even to the very same group of trees or bushes, as the one that they occupied in the previous year. The Spotted-Flycatcher exhibits site fidelity in non breeding areas of Africa, with individuals reported up to three consecutive years at the same site, and the trapping and observation of ringed individuals in South Africa have revealed that a Spotted Flycatcher will remain in one small area throughout its stay. Similarly, the European Pied Flycatcher is sedentary in its wintering sites, one individual of this species having been trapped six times at the same site, year after year, with up to five years in succession reported in Kenya, and the Spotted Flycatcher may use traditional nest-sites for many years, even though the same individual may not be involved in each year. In Europe, breeding sites have been occupied by Spotted Flycatchers for up to 48 years.

In another study, S. J. Skead, has kept meticulous notes from 50 years of patient observation of birds in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. He has recorded drinking habits of Cisticolids only a few times. Despite thousands of hours in the field, he observed drinking only at a sheltered birdbath under the hedge of his garden. Apparently most Cisticolids typically obtain all their water needs from their food. Species such as the Streaked Scrub-warbler and the Cricket Warbler survive the entire year in very arid environments without access to standing water, and they are not known to visit water even when it is available. In Ethiopia, Grey-backed Camaropteras have been reported as not drinking even during severe drought.

Voice:

As with most passerines, vocal communication is extremely important and it functions in a wide range of social contexts. The most obvious forms of vocalization are advertising or territorial songs, which are used as a method of establishing territories and attracting mates. They may have evolved under pressures of sexual selection or during the process of speciation. As a result the song is largely the preserve of the male cisticolid. In most species the male sings from an elevated perch or in a display flight. The aerial display of Prinias and some cisticolas are rather short, jerky flights accompanied by loud singing, and they appear to represent little more than the climax of a bout of singing. The Zetting Cisticola for example has a contact-alarm call, an excitement or anger call, two types of alarm calls, and a courtship call. Chicks have a begging call and a snake like hissing call, given when an intruder enters the nest. Some Prinias have similar range calls, with the addition of a possible hawk-alarm call, given when an aerial predator is seen. Cisticolas also produce a variety of non-vocal noises. Bill snapping is common among many species. Wing snapping is also fairly common among Cisticolas, especially species with aerial displays, but is performed also by some Prinias, apaliases, wren warblers and camaropteras. The wing-snapping Cisticola has unusually narrow primaries, which may assist in producing the loud snapping noises during courtship displays.

Songs remain the best means of identifying many cisticolas and some other cryptic species, but they are by no means diagnostic for all. Many apalis songs are strikingly similar to one another, confusing not only to the human ear but also, seemingly, to the ears of the singers. In Malawi, Chapin's, Brown-headed and Bar-throated Apalises all respond to each other's songs, and even defend mutually exclusive territories, in some instances. Such results call into question studies which argue for the conspecific status of disjunct populations on the basis largely of vocal similarity, as is the case with Chubb's Cisticola of East Africa and the Brown-backed Cisticola, the latter being currently treated as two western races of the former. In systematics, a shared ancestral trait, such as two taxa having similar songs is not informative; species and other taxa can be defined only by the pattern of differences in derived characters.

Indeed some cryptic species have only been discovered, as exemplified by the River Prinia (*Prinia fluviatilis*). Prior to its description by Chappusi, in 1974, this had been passed off as a pale form of the Tawny-flanked Prinia, and it took the ear of Africa's greatest bird acoustician to detect the subtle differences in its song from that of its close relative. Yet the birds themselves certainly can tell the difference; in play back trials, each species gave virtually no response to the songs of the other. Occasionally, a mistake may occur. One Tawny-flanked Prinia was found to include River Prinia song in its repertoire, suggesting that it had been exposed to the latter's song at some stage, although it was more than a kilometer from the nearest River Prinia habitat.

Song and its divergence play a major role in causing reproductive isolation and speciation. This is demonstrated particularly well by the *Phylloscopus* and *Seicercus* warblers. In the Greenish Warbler, for example, a "ring species" of central Asia, the populations of western Siberia and eastern Siberia have overlapping ranges and share the same habitat, but they differ greatly in song structure, which changes gradually around the ring.

Food and Feeding:

Frugivory may often be a means of supplementing the primary animal diet, but for several migrants fruit is a major component of pre-migratory fat accumulation. This is even expressed in one of the local names of the Garden Warbler in Italy, beccafico, recalling this species habit of feeding on figs. The diet of Garden Warblers at passage stopover sites could be made up exclusively of fruits, as could also be the case of Blackcaps and Common Whitethroats. This may seem paradoxical when one considers the low energetic value of most fruits in comparison with animal prey. Recent studies on garden Warblers and others, however, have revealed that fruit eating during migration contributes considerably to the fattening of these migrants. Migration is energetically costly. Most migrants must, therefore, accumulate large stores of energy before undertaking long flights. Within a couple of weeks, an individual can double its body mass. The well studied Garden Warbler is a good example. This species migrates between breeding grounds in Europe and western Asia and non-breeding quarters in tropical Africa, and has therefore to cross the Sahara desert on each journey; it weighs about 16-18 grams during the breeding and wintering seasons, but is body mass increases up to 37grams just before it embarks on a crossing of the Sahara., both in autumn and in spring. Typically 70-80% of body mass gain is due to fat accumulation. The energy for migration, therefore, derives primarily from lipids, which are stored mainly subcutaneously. Fat accumulation is one of the most spectacular physiological preparations for migration, and the amount of fat stored is related to the distance the birds have to cover, but also limits flight distance.

Among fantails the major component of the diet is small insects and other invertebrates. This is because the rhipidurid bill is not strong enough to handle larger, more robust prey. A habit which the fantails share with monarchs, but not with muscicapid flycatchers, is the practice of holding the prey item under the foot while dismembering it. Fantails will also use to carry food while in flight.

A study of three co-existing Australian fantails in the New England Tablelands of New South Wales yielded interesting results. It was found that Grey Fantail, the Rufous Fantail and the Willie Fantail partition the environment, selecting different heights and sections of the substrate, and using different foraging techniques, thereby reducing foraging overlap and competition. In New Guinea, where a number of riphidurid species exist in close proximity, the situation is more complex. Here members of a fantail community partition the environment according to the vegetation strata, the position of the forest, whether edge or interior, the height at which they forage, the method of foraging employed, and the altitude at which they occur.

Fantails use a variety of actions for attacking and capturing their prey. Different authors have employed a range of terms for the same individual types of behavior, or have subdivided particular technique into finer categories. In ‘hawking’ or ‘sallying’, the bird is in flight for the purpose of capturing an airborne insect. The ‘sally-strike’ is sometimes used when a flying bird picks an insect off vegetation as it passes. This contrasts with hover gleaning, in which the forager flutters in the air while picking a prey item off a leaf or branch. Gleaning refers to the behavior whereby a perched individual pecks the prey from the same substrate. Occasionally, a bird appears to fall of the perch, tumbling towards the ground after a flying insect, a manoeuvre known as ‘tumble chase’.

These actions are employed by fantails as part of two foraging methods, although in different proportions depending on the species and the season. In the first, sometimes called as ‘static searching’, a fantail sits on a lookout perch for several seconds or more while searching its surroundings for prey, usually aerial insects. When it sights an item, it makes a sally out to pursue it. The flight may be short and direct or in contrast, highly acrobatic, with many twists and turns. After either catching or losing its meal, the fantail returns to a perch to process and eat the insect or to carry on searching. It may frequently return to the same perch after a series of flycatching pursuits.

The second foraging method has been called ‘progressive searching’. In this, the fantail moves continuously through vegetation while looking for stationery prey, which it gleans from the leaf or branch. The incessant movement also causes more cryptic prey to flush, whereupon the fantail seizes these in a quick sally, a technique referred to as ‘flush-pursuit’. Fantails often adopt a characteristic posture in which the wings are drooped and held out at about 45 degrees from the body, and the tail broadly fanned. As an individual advances along a branch or around the leaves, it moves rapidly from side to side or even spins, actions that are thought to assist in the flushing of prey.

Breeding:

“One of the most surprising aspects about breeding in Terpsiphone Paradise Flycatchers is the apparent lack of concern for camouflage: their nests are often poorly concealed in the open, leafless situations. They tend to be very easy for humans to find, especially when the adult male is incubating eggs or feeding young. The colourful plumage and bright arching tail of the male Paradise Flycatcher does little to disguise its presence and morph males are even more obvious! To offset the increased risk of predation, pairs of paradise flycatchers co-operate aggressively to defend their nests.”

Among the members of family Regulidae (Kinglets and Firecrests), only the females undertake the task of nest-building duties. But surprisingly a member of this family *viz* the Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*) which breeds in Europe Central Asia and its wintering range includes the Himalayas, has both the male and female building the nests. Being a habitat specialist the Goldcrest rarely builds its nest in a deciduous tree. Instead, its nest is usually situated high in conifers, often in thinner branches near the outer edge of the tree. The nest typically contains an abundance of lichens, and a few feathers protruding from the top. The nest entrance is narrow, so the feathers tend to conceal the nest contents when the adult is absent. The lining itself is very downy, and it has been calculated that a typical Goldcrest nest contains upto 2,500 feathers. The labour involved in compiling this collection perhaps explains, at least in part, why both parents share nest-building duties. Thus the Goldcrest appears to be exceptional in that both sexes are involved in the construction of the nest, in about equal shares; moreover the male is responsible for building the nest for the rearing of the second brood.

During the breeding season, *Regulus* species usually rear two successive broods. The clutch size of Goldcrest ranges between six and 13 eggs, second clutch containing slightly fewer eggs. Incubation duration which is about 15 days, is undertaken solely by the female. Chicks fed by both sexes, nestling period 14-17 days, and fledglings fed by parents for 12-18 days after having left nest.

Breeding Failure:

For the comparatively few members of the family Cisticolidae, for which relevant data is available, breeding success is on an average 38% for 13 species, with a range of 20-60%. Individual studies have found even greater range, with the success rate of Bar-throated Apalises near Cape town as low as 10% and that of Zitting Cisticolas in Europe as high as 75% . By far the greatest cause of breeding failure is predation, primarily by snakes and mammals, although insects such as ants and crickets, as well as other birds, are also responsible for some nest failures. Other causes of failure include adverse weather conditions, starvation, egg infertility, ectoparasites, nest desertion by adults, trampling, and destruction of habitat by fire, flooding or harvesting. All species of this family re-lay after breeding failure, some pairs laying several replacement clutches in a month and making at least eight nesting attempts in a single breeding season. In this way they are able to compensate for the generally low success rate in individual breeding attempts.

Parasitism:

Several warbler species suffer brood parasitism by cuckoos, and this also could be partly responsible for low breeding success. There is a potentially high selection pressure on the host to reduce the extent of parasitism, as through rejection of the cuckoo's egg or chick. The egg stage seems to be the most successful stage of the breeding cycle for rejecting the parasitic eggs. How they distinguish alien eggs and the parasite counters their efforts are interesting subjects, and ones into which recent studies of several warblers reveal new insights.

One study involved three Australian Reed-warblers. Although this species is sympatric with and suitable for at least seven cuckoo species, it is currently not a major host of any brood-parasite. It has however, occasionally been parasitized by at least four species of cuckoo; the Fan-tailed cuckoo, the Pallid Cuckoo, Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo and the Shining Bronze-cuckoo. These four cuckoo species are all known to remove a host's egg when laying their own, and their hatchlings evict the host's offspring from the nest. Experimental brood parasitism involving placement of different eggs in the warbler's nests revealed finely tuned discrimination response: (1) non-mimetic eggs were significantly more often rejected than were conspecific eggs; (2) only non-mimetic dummy eggs were rejected selectively, whereas rejection of conspecific eggs entailed a cost; (3) replacement of a host's egg with a conspecific egg during laying resulted in a significantly higher rejection rate than occurred after the day of clutch completion; (4) In contrast, the rejection rate after addition of a conspecific egg did not vary with stage of nesting; (5) conspecific eggs introduced into a clutch during the laying period led to a significantly higher nest-desertion rate and a lower egg-rejection rate than occurred after the day of clutch completion; and (6) addition of a conspecific egg led to ejection, while egg replacement with a conspecific egg led to nest desertion. The fact that the Australian Reed-warbler reacts differently towards different modes of artificial parasitism suggests that its egg-discrimination ability has evolved as a means of minimizing the costs of rejection and parasitism. The ability to reject highly mimetic conspecific eggs may explain the current paucity of brood parasitism in this species.

In studies concerning the Great Reed-warblers in central Hungary, an unusually high frequency of Common Cuckoo parasitism was found, with 64% of nests parasitized. Of the parasitized clutches 64% contained one cuckoo egg, 23% contained two, 10% three and 3% had four eggs. Thus 58% of the cuckoo eggs were found in multiple parasitized clutches. The hosts responded in different ways: 66% accepted the parasite's eggs, 12% rejected them, 20% deserted the nest, and 2% buried the eggs. The colour and pattern of both the host egg and the parasitic egg displayed huge variation, reducing the probability of the parasitic egg matching that of the host in appearance. Nevertheless, 28% of the cuckoo eggs were almost perfect in their mimicry. Great Reed-warblers rejected poorly mimetic cuckoo eggs more frequently than they did eggs that were very similar to their own. The high level of mimicry can make it difficult for the human observer to identify the parasite's egg, particularly if it is similar in size to the host's eggs. It is also difficult for the host, as shown by a relatively frequent degree of error in egg recognition.

First Breeding Attempts:

The age of first breeding has not been determined for many Cisticolid species. In the north-temperate region, chicks from early broods of Zitting Cisticolas and Graceful Prinias are remarkable for attempting to breed in the same season as that in which they were reared. In Japan, female Zitting Cisticolas make their first breeding attempts as early as 27 days after fledging, and over the course of a season juveniles account for some 11% of all breeding attempts. Compared with adults, these young females, after accepting a male's nest, take longer to start egg-laying, lay slightly smaller clutches and have a higher proportion of infertile eggs. There is some evidence that their chicks more often starve, but given the high predation rate at nests of both adults and juveniles, the overall breeding success of the young females does not differ from that of the adults. No juvenile has been known to rear two broods in a season, but one did lay a replacement clutch following breeding failure.

Mortality:

Among most seasonally breeding warbler species, the young are capable of breeding in the year following that in which they hatched, at which time they are 9-10 months old. Unfortunately, however, not much is known about first-year survival and recruitment into breeding population, nor about adult survival and breeding-site fidelity. Ringing studies focused on central European Blackcaps revealed a first-year mortality of 68%, an adult mortality of 54%, and an average age of the population of 1.6 – 1.8 years; 40.8% of breeding adults and 7.6% of their young of the year returned to the study site. The mean life expectancy of the Eurasian Reed-warbler is 2 – 2.3 years, which is rather high when compared with the mere 1.06 – 1.83 years found for the marsh warbler. In ringing studies, the oldest Eurasian Reed-warblers were 11 years and 12 years of age, the corresponding figures for the Marsh Warbler being 8 years and 9 years and for the Sedge Warbler only 6 years.

Very high annual survival is reported for some island-restricted resident *Acrocephalus* species. The figure for adult male Nightingale Reed-warblers is at least 82%, for Hendrson Reed-warblers is 85-90%, and for Seychelles Brush-warblers is 89.3%. In contrast, the annual survival rate of adult Great Reed-warblers, a migratory species, was found to be 47%.

Comparatively low survival rates are reported for Wood Warblers, with 31% for the first-year individuals and 40% for adults.

Movements:

Of the 270 currently recognized Old World warblers about which sufficient information on their movement is available, approximately 45% are migratory at least in parts of their breeding range, and some 80 species are regular latitudinal migrants. Chestnut-headed Tesias, for example, breed in the eastern Himalayas at 1600-4000 m, mostly above 2400 m, but spend the winter period at much lower levels, between 245 m and 1830 m. Another example is the Chestnut-crowned Bush-warbler, which breeds in fir forest between 3300 m and the tree-line in the Himalayas and descends in winter to lowlands, usually below 250 m, as also do several Phylloscopus species, such as the Buff-throated, Buff-barred and Ashy-throated Warblers.

One of the best-studied of all migratory species is the Blackcap. This varies form being sedentary to being a long-distance migrant, depending on breeding location. It also shows a pattern of “leap-frog migration”; the more to the north the population breeds, the farther to the south it migrates. Populations on the Atlantic and Mediterranean islands are largely sedentary, those in the Mediterranean Basin and parts of west Europe are partly migratory, and those from the north and the east of the range are long distance migrants, flying about 6000 km to wintering grounds in Eastern Africa. These migrants cover up to 200-240 km per night, and more rarely up to 1000 km during a sea crossing. Blackcaps also exhibit what is termed as a “migratory divide”: migratory populations west of about 12-13 degrees E head south-west in autumn to winter quarters in the western Mediterranean and western sub-Saharan Africa, while those to the east migrate south-east to non breeding grounds in south-eastern Europe and eastern Africa. Around this migratory divide in central Europe, a pronounced change in migratory behavior has been observed since 1960s. A juvenile ringed in 1961 in Austria was recovered in the following December in southern Ireland. Since then, an increasing number of central European Blackcaps have been found to spend the winter in the southern parts of the British Isles. Although they may have done so earlier, poor winter conditions did not enable the migrants to survive. Increasing supplies of winter food after the Second World War, as well as milder winters in the British Isles, allowed these Blackcaps to survive.

The family Sylviidae includes some of the world’s longest traveling avian migrants. The River Warbler, for example, breeds in Europe north to 60 degree N and spends the non-breeding season in south-east Africa. Garden Warblers, Barred Warblers and Marsh Warblers may fly more than 6000 km between European breeding grounds and the African wintering sites, and the Willow Warblers migrate from the arctic taiga to non-breeding grounds in southern Africa. Eastern populations of Willow Warblers move west initially, and then south through western Siberia, those from the most easterly parts of the range traveling up to 12,000 km to wintering grounds in Africa.

Migratory Old World warblers are chiefly nocturnal migrants, and they migrate solitarily. In most cases, adults depart from the breeding grounds slightly before juveniles, several as early as early July. Males often arrive in wintering areas some days before females, indicating either an earlier start of migration or a faster journey. In spring, males of many species arrive back on the breeding grounds a few days before the females, this phenomenon being more marked in seasonally earlier migrants such as Blackcaps, and less so in late migrants, such as Garden Warblers. There is much debate about the benefits of early spring arrival. It is often assumed that males of the highest phenotypic quality are the first to arrive on the breeding grounds because only males in good condition can afford the costs of early arrival. It is suggested that the amount of advantage which an individual can gain from early arrival depends on how good the possibilities are of successfully occupying and defending a high quality territory. These in turn may depend on the male’s powers to hold resources and on the value of previous territory ownership. In studies of Dusky Warblers, males which had occupied high-quality territories during the period of post-breeding moult, just before departure to the winter quarters, were the first to return in spring, which suggests that high motivation is the factor behind early arrival. Early arrival did not depend on male quality or body condition. Males having a small body size invested more in gaining prior ownership of territories than did large males. These findings indicate that individual variation in benefits, rather than in costs, resulting from early arrival, determine which males are the first to arrive.

Migratory warblers exhibit not only some striking fidelity to breeding site or natal site, but also, in many cases, marked site fidelity during migration and in non-breeding quarters, returning year after year to the same stopover or wintering site. Although there are only a few well documented examples, based on ringed individuals of, for example, the Blackcap, Common whitethroat, Great Reed-warbler and Melodious warbler, the phenomenon may be more widespread, and it seems to be linked to a species-specific migratory strategy. In Malawi, a Blackcap was re-trapped at the same wintering site for five years after ringing.

During return migration to the breeding grounds in spring, many species use roughly the same route as that taken during the autumn. In contrast, Garden warblers wintering in western Africa demonstrate what is known as “loop migration”, in which northbound spring migrants travel on a more easterly route, compared with southbound autumn migrants.

Many species are partial migrants. Indeed, partial migration is probably the most widespread pattern of avian movements. For example, the Blackcaps in southern France, one part of the species’ population remains on the breeding grounds throughout the year, whereas the other part migrates. Two different types of partial migration are identifiable. One is facultative, whereby members of the partially migratory population do not migrate annually but only under particular circumstances, such as adverse weather conditions, food shortages or high population density. The other is obligate, whereby migratory members of the partially migratory population migrate regularly every year, irrespective of local conditions.

Notably, Sylvia warblers have been, and still are, model species for ecological, physiological and genetic studies in the context of bird migration and orientation.

Considerable evidence exists that the young of many, if not most, migratory species know instinctively the direction in which they must leave the natal area. Juveniles regularly reach the correct destination independently of their parents. Numerous experiments and field studies have focused on the orientation and navigation abilities of birds, and the sylviids have featured prominently in such studies. The innate nature of migratory directions has been illustrated by experiments with captive warbler migrants.

Little is known about the controlling factors for migrations subsequent to the first ones. Older migrants have already undergone at least one complete migration cycle, and thereby gained experience that may be used during subsequent migrations. Site-fidelity in the non–breeding quarters can be astonishingly high. For a number of tropical migrants, color-ringed individuals reportedly return almost to the same bush in the following year, and the rate of return to the previous wintering site in western Africa may be as high as the level of fidelity to breeding site. In comparisons of captive Garden Warblers and Sardinian Warblers, both raised by hand, it was found that memory of a particular site persisted for at least 12 months in the long distance migrant garden Warbler, whereas the closely related but non-migratory Sardinian Warbler could remember such a site for only two weeks. It seems, therefore, that the migratory lifestyle has influenced the learning and memorizing capacities of migrants.

Relationship with Man:

In Asia Common Tailor Birds are well known for their loud, ringing calls and distinctive, tail-cocked stance. If not harassed, they may be very confiding, breeding in pot plants on sheltered verandas, and often using man-made fibers to sew up their nests. Some individuals have been reputed to watch tailors at work, and then, when their human counterparts leave their stations, to dash out and grab spare threads left lying around.

In Africa a fair number of the more common members of the Cisticola family have names in their native languages. But also a surprising diversity of Cisticolas in at least some languages, indicating the ability of the local people to discriminate between various species of this notoriously similar looking birds. It was probably their distinctive songs rather than their appearance that were responsible for their being named individually. Many of the native names are onomatopoetic, reflecting the importance of calls in their identification.

R. Godfrey was instrumental in cataloguing birdlore of Xhosa people in eastern Cape of South Africa. He reports on the practice of young boys of asking questions to calling Grey-backed Camaropteras; if birds’ calling persists beyond the end of the boys’ question, this is assumed to imply a positive response. Other species may be used to tell the time of the day; Wailing Cisticolas were reputed to call after sunset, thus letting herd-boys know that it was time to head for home on overcast days.

The members of the family Rhipiduridae are well known because they are common and active. This, combined with their tame and confiding nature around human beings, has made them familiar to the general public and particular favorites among birdwatchers. This recognition is reflected in the number of popular nicknames that these birds have attracted: “cranky fan”, “mad thrush”, “mad fan”, “snapper”, “shepherds companion” and “Australian nightingale”.

The fearlessness has earned the Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*), certain reputations among indigenous peoples of Australia and New Guinea. Its habit of readily approaching humans, has gained it the reputation of being a messenger or manifestation of the dead. In some parts of New Guinea, this fantail is thought to be the ghost of a paternal relative. Elsewhere, this species has the reputation of being a gossip; it is not persecuted, but important business is not discussed when this fantail is present. Among the aboriginal people of Musgrave Ranges, in central Australia, this fantail was allegedly despised because of its reputation for entering camps in order to hear what was being said and then carrying tales to others.

Status and Conservation:

Many flycatcher species are able to exploit disturbed or man-modified natural habitats, such as logged or secondary forest, and even to colonize artificial habitats such as plantations, cultivated areas, parks, gardens and tree-lined avenues in built-up areas. Even in these habitats, however, they are dependent upon finding suitable nesting sites, which, in case of cavity-nesting species, may be scarce and may limit their ability to capitalize on otherwise suitable areas. Other muscicapid species, however, are confined to pristine or largely unmodified forest habitats, and, given the extent of forest destruction within their ranges, it is only to be expected that a relatively large number these flycatchers will be globally threatened.

With most of its species dependent on forest and occurring in Asia, the large genus Ficedula contains several threatened taxa. The Kashmir flycatcher is a migratory species, having a small, declining breeding population in the Himalayas that spends the non-breeding season in Sri Lanka. Formerly common in its restricted breeding range, it has declined in many areas as a result of habitat destruction, and is listed as Vulnerable. The *Ficedula* flycatcher that inhabits southern India is the Black-and-orange Flycatcher, is potentially threatened by forest destruction, but is still reasonably common, as it can use modified habitats.

The forest dwelling Asian genera *Eumyias* and *Cyornis* have their share of problems related to habitat destruction. Two of the *Eumyias* species are considered Near-threatened. One of these, the Dull Verditer-flycatcher, is confined to Sri Lanka, where it is generally common in well-wooded areas of higher altitudes, but scarce at lower levels. It is resilient to habitat degradation, but the extent of forest clearance in its small range gives cause for concern. The other, the Nilgiri Flycatcher, is common, but has a small range in the Western Ghats of southern India. Although it tolerates disturbed habitats, it is potentially threatened by heavy grazing and total habitat loss.

For further details please contact: **Lynx Edicions**, Montseny, 8, E-08193, Bellaterra, Barcelona, Spain. E-mail: lynx@hbw.com. Internet: http://www.hbw.com

Indian Context:

So vivid and dramatic has been the narration in this Volume, that a casual reader might well be infatuated to take up avian field studies at once. Even weekend field visits will not only stimulate and charge a birder, but also fortify the mind and enable him/her to progressively acquire leadership potentials.

Every birder from Kashmir to Kanyakumari will be richly benefited by the Handbook of the Birds of the World. In this direction, the volumes offer vital tips and tactics for building stability and better management of regional avian habitats, not only for a privileged few warblers and flycatchers, but also for all other bird species at large.

Essentially, in the section relating to the status and conservation, the contrast between yesteryears seemingly invincible environment and today’s all pervading fractured habitats has been made obvious. It is a pointer that reckless domineering over the environment is evidently resulting in disasters. The torpor and lethargy of Indian administrators in promptly dealing with ecological disasters are also compounding the problems for humans and wildlife alike.

Instead of addressing the problems with a civic mind and farsightedness, our country’s crippled ecological leadership seems to be barking up the wrong trees or offering straightjacket solutions. Only a hard headed and thoroughly professional appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of proposed developments, can result in containing the scourge.

Research inside protected areas or bird ringing experiments in India, are governed by the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Therefore, for the purpose of scientific research or study of birds, permission has to be obtained from the Chief Wildlife Warden or any person authorized by him.

Tough as they may seem, laws and conventions to regulate and protect wildlife depend on the competence and willingness of the authorities to enforce them in letter and spirit. The central problem is that the wildlife decision-makers in India have on several instances been found to be less than appreciative or willing to grant permission for wildlife research. Even if granted, intransigent bureaucracies, frustrate the researchers out of their wits.

Perhaps, such deadlocks could be avoided if greater transparency in managing the affairs is put into operation through an institutional mechanism. Last but not the least, India, which is rich in avian diversity, needs to brace itself honorably for playing its part to achieve the cherished objectives of the Indian Forest Act, 1927, the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and the Biological Diversity Conservation Act 2002.

Roosting behaviour of White-bellied Tree Pie (*Dendrocitta leucogastra* Gould, 1833)

S. Babu and **E. A. Jayson,** Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi - 680653, Trichur, Kerala

Roosting habits and site selection of forest birds (Gaston, 1980; Bastawde, 1976 and George, 1965), communal roosting of birds (Gadgil and Ali, 1976; Feare, 1977 and Jayson and Mathew, 1995), roosting of raptorial birds (Satheesan and Rao, 1990; Singh, Grubh, and Pandey, 1996) and water birds (Dodia and Parasharya, 1986; Sashikumar, 1991) have been well studied in India. Among the forest birds, selection of roost sites of endemic taxa is not available. In this note the roosting behaviour and roost site of White-bellied tree pie is reported.

Nelliampathy hills are in the western slopes of the southern Western Ghats located in the southern side of the Palghat gap in Kerala. Geographically, the Nelliampathy lies between 10° 202 and 10° 482 N and between 76° 302 and 76° 552 E. The plantations in the area consist of monoculture tree crops and estates of coffee or tea which were initiated in the 1860's and the intensive cultivation was carried out in the early 20th century. Even with these anthropogenic influences and habitat alterations, Nelliampathy hills still have some remnant patches of pristine evergreen forests, which harbour rich diversity of life in the Western Ghats.

White-bellied Tree Pie (*Dendrocitta leucogastra*) is one of the five Tree pies of the Indian sub-continent and the only species of the genus *Dendrocitta* restricted to the Western Ghats. The habitat of this species is known as the evergreen biotope in the Western Ghats chain (Ali and Ripley, 1983). On July 23rd 2005, a pair of White-bellied Tree Pie was observed to roost in the bamboo thickets, which was 2.5 m distance away from an estate road. The roosting site was in a riparian forest, bounded with human habitation and coffee plantations. The height of the roosting was 1 m above ground and the birds perched on a branch near the trunk. While roosting, both the partners were involved in pre-roosting vocalization for a while followed by pre roosting display flight above the roost site. After descending to the roost both the birds roosted on a same branch facing opposite direction. In another observation in the same roost on 19th February 2006, only one bird was recorded in the roost. Since this observation was during the breeding season *i.e* February-April (Ali and Ripley, 1983), it is assumed that the other bird may be attending the nesting duties. The observations indicated that the White-bellied Tree Pie is using the same site for roosting continuously and the selected roost site was near to a human habitation. Whether the endemic and forest bird species also prefer roost sites near human habitation for roosting as in other communal roosting birds need further studies.

References

Ali, S. and Ripley, D. (1983). *Hand Book of the birds of India and Pakistan*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. 737p.

Gadgil, M and Salim, A. (1976). Communal roosting habits of Indian birds. *J. Bombay Nat Hist Soc.,* 72(3), 716-727.

Feare, C. J. (1977). Communal roosting in the Myna *Acridotheres tristis*. *J. Bombay Nat Hist Soc.,* 73(3), 525-527.

Gaston, A. J. (1980). Roosting behaviour of flocks of the Crested Black Tit (*Parus melanolophus*). *J. Bombay Nat Hist Soc.,* 76(3), 517-518.

Dodia, J. F. and Parasharya, B. M. (1986). Black Ibis roosting on electric poles. *Newsletter for Bird watchers*. 26 (5-6), 16-17.

Bastawde, D.B. (1976). The roosting habits of Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis orientalis* Latham. *J. Bombay Nat Hist Soc*., 73(1), 215.

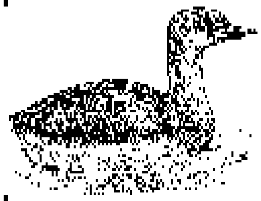
George, P.V. (1965). Swallows *Hirundo rustica* Linnaeus roosting on wires. *J. Bombay Nat Hist Soc*. 62(1), 160.

Satheesan, S.M and Rao, P. (1990). Roosting and feeding of Harriers in Secunderabad, Andhra Pradesh. *J. Bombay Nat Hist Soc* 87(1), 143.

Sashikumar, C. (1991). On the roosting of Indian Whiskered Tern. . *Newsletter for Bird watchers*. 31(5-6), 13.

Jayson, E. A and Mathew, D. N. (1995). Roosting behaviour of Common Indian Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) at Trichur, Kerala. *Pavo* 33(1&2), 41-46.

Singh, R. B; Grubh, R. B and Pandey, K.C. (1996). Movements of Indian White backed Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* between their permanent feeding ground and roosting sites near Bombay, India. *Vulture News* 34, 3-7.

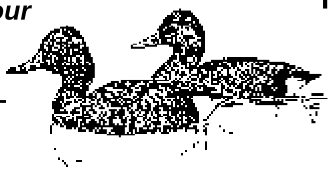


Enroll a Friend

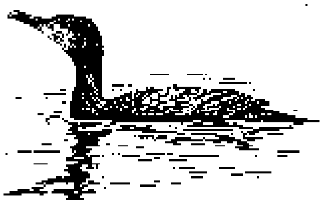
If every Newsletter member could enrol just one new member our reach and linkage would be doubled immediately!

Will you Help ?

Please give the membership form to a friend and urge him/her to join.



CORRESPONDENCE



LARGEST ASSEMBLAGE OF ASIAN OPENBILLS ANASTOMUS OSCITANS IN A SINGLE TREE IN THE KULIK BIRD SANCTUARY, NORTH DINAJPUR DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL, INDIA.

ARUNAYAN SHARMA, Centre for Ecological Engineering, Netaji Subhash Road, In front of T.O.P, Malda – 732 101, West Bengal, India. Email: s_arunayan@rediffmail.com

I was counting flocks of Asian Openbills *Anastomus oscitans* in the Kulik Bird Sanctuary on 15 August 2006. During the counts, I came across a large assemblage of this species in a single Jarul *Lagerstroemia flosreginae* tree. It was a big tree with many main and sub-branches spread over an area of c.60sq m. It was quite a tedious job of constantly looking upwards and straining the neck to count the Asian Openbills. It took me more than 120 minutes from 11h40 to 14h15 to count the large assemblage on that particular tree. In all, I counted 538 nests on that tree of which 21 nests were unoccupied. Birds were found in 517 nests only. Average distance between nests was about a meter.

After counting the large assemblage for the first time, I found that at that time there were 2,105 individuals roosting on that particular tree. Although it was not very pleasing or hygienic to count the Asian Openbills, which were defecating malodorous droppings every now and then, I undertook the ordeal ungrudgingly. I counted those birds by direct observation through a 10x50 binocular and 20-60 telescope. I used the simple method by assuming two parents and two chicks per nest. I checked my counting thrice. In my second counting I estimated 2,010 individuals and on rechecking the result was 1,987 individuals. In some nests no parents were found and in some other nests only adults were found. Some individuals were also found roosting on the branches. Birds arriving and leaving the tree every now and then were not included in the counting. It appears that on an average there was c.2,000 Asian Openbills on that particular tree. It was the largest assemblage of Asian Openbills ever found in a single tree in the Kulik Bird Sanctuary. However 40,160 Asian Openbills were accounted from the Kulik Bird Sanctuary in the year 2006. Probably it could be the largest Asian Openbill breeding colony in that region.

The Kulik Bird Sanctuary is in a confined pocketed area in the North Dinajpur district of West Bengal which was officially designated as the “Raiganj Wildlife Sanctuary” in the year 1985. It lies just 4km north from the Raiganj town known for its highest breeding population of Asian Openbills. This breeding colony is estimated among top ten heronries of India (Subramanya 1996) and now an Important Bird Area (IBA) of India (Islam & Rahmani 2004). The sanctuary is also popularly known as Kulik Bird Sanctuary, because the river Kulik flows besides the sanctuary and acts as the boundary in its eastern and southern parts (Sharma 2004). It is actually a mixed breeding heronry of various species of waterfowl, mainly Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*, Indian Shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*, Black Crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax,* Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Large Egret *Casmerodius albus*, Median Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia* and Pond Heron *Aredeola grayii*. Along with them a large number of Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* are breeding here since 1984. The regular breeding colony is now established as one of the biggest Asian Openbill *Anstomus oscitans* heronry in India. Here, on an average 30,000 to 40,000 individuals breed successfully between the months of July and December each year (Sharma 2001, 2004).

The habitat of this heronry is an artificial forest habitat chiefly comprising of Kadam *Anthocephalus cadamba*, Jarul *Lagerstroemia flosreginae*, Sisoo *Dalbergia sissoo* and *Eucalyptus* (Sharma 2001, 2004) and classified as Tropical Dry Deciduous Forest (Champion & Seth 1968). The area of the sanctuary is c. 1.30 sq km in which the Core Area is c. 0.14 Sq km and Buffer Area is c. 1.16 Sq km. The shape of the sanctuary is that of the English alphabet “U” with a network of artificial canals connected with the river Kulik. There is also a small island in the core area of the sanctuary, which predominantly comprises of Eucalyptus trees. It is surrounded by artificial canals which is the main breeding ground for the Asian Openbills. There are some 650 odd nesting trees within the protected area, where the birds breed without any disturbances. During monsoon, the Kulik river water enters the sanctuary, which supports a wide variety of food for the birds, particularly for the Asian Openbill whose main diet is Apple Snail *Pila globosa* (Sharma 2001, 2004).

Competition for selection of nesting trees and nest building is high in this heronry. Such of those individuals failing to get a chance to build a nest inside the sanctuary, prefer to build their nests outside the protected area along the National Highway 34, or the gardens or backyard trees adjacent to human settlements. At least six species of water birds are found building nests in close proximity of each other (Datta & Pal 1990). It is easy to watch the nest building and breeding activities in this sanctuary. Anybody can watch their activities from just two meters away. One can regularly watch Docile Asian Openbills roaming the floor of the sanctuary (Sharma 1998).

It is still not clear as to why such a large number of Asian Openbills flock the small area of the Kulik Bird Sanctuary, which is subjected to lots of human and artificial interferences during their breeding period. It may be that the same batch of birds, which hatched and fledged from this sanctuary, returns year after year. Probably the birds have behaviorally accepted and habituated to such artificial conditions since their birth. This behavior of Asian Openbills needs further research and investigation. Yet another advantage for the birds is that the region is a flood plain area and predominantly rice growing area dotted with many large water bodies, riverine beds and marshy areas which have lots of their main diet, the Apple Snail (Sharma 2001).

Acknowledgements

I am very thankful the District Forest Officer for allowing me to count the birds and to the forest guards of Kulik Bird Sanctuary, for helping me in many ways during the counts.

References

Alfred, J.R.B, Varsheny, R.K & Ghosh, A.K. (1996) *An Assessment Manual for Faunal Biodiversity in South Asia.* South Asia Co-Operative Environment Programme (SACEP) Sri Lanka and Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata.

Collias, N.E. & Collias, E.C. (1984) *Nest Building and Bird Behaviour*. Princeton University Press. Princeton, New Jersey.

Champion, H.G. & Seth, S.K. (1968) *A Revised Classification of Forest Types of India*. Manager Publications. New Delhi.

Datta, T. & Pal, B.C. (1990) Space partitioning in relation to nesting among six bird species in the heronry at Kulik Bird Sanctuary, West Bengal. *Environment Ecology*, (8): 86-91.

Islam, M.Z. & Rahmani, A.R. (2004) *Important Bird Area in India: Priority sites for conservation.* Indian Bird Conservation Network: Bombay Natural History Society and Birdlife International, U.K.

Javed, S. & Kaul, R. (2002) *Field Methods for Bird Surveys.* Bombay Natural History Society-Mumbai, Department of Wildlife Sciences, Aligarh Muslim University- Aligarh and World Pheasant Association, South-Asia Regional Office (SARO), New Delhi, India.

Sahni, K.C. (1998) *The Book of Indian trees*. Bombay Natural History Society & Oxford University Press.

Sale, J.B. & BerKmuller, K. (1988) *Manual of Wildlife Techniques for India.* Field Document No: 11, FO: IND/82/003. Food & Agricultural Organisatiuon of the United Nations.

Sharma, A. (2001) In the land of Asian Openbill. *Environ* 8(2): 59-61. Nature, Environment & Wildlife Society, Kolkata.

Sharma, A. (2004) Birding at Raiganj Bird Sanctuary, North Dinajpur district in West Bengal. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 44(6): 89-90.

Subramanya, S. (1996) Distribution, Status and Conservation of Indian Heronries. *Journal of Bombay Natural History Society.* 93 (3): 459-486.

UNUSUAL MATING BEHAVIOUR AND REVERSAL OF ROLES IN PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRDS (NECTARINIA ZEYLONICA)

RAJU KASAMBE, G-1, Laxmi Apartments, 64,Vidya Vihar Colony, Pratap Nagar, Nagpur-440022, Maharashtra. E-mail: kasambe.raju@gmail.com

On 20th August 2006, a pair of Purple-rumped Sunbirds (*Nectarinia zeylonica*) started nesting activity on a Ber (*Zizypus* spp.) tree just opposite to my window. The nest was 12-13 feet above ground and around 15 feet away from my window. I studied the breeding behaviour of the birds without ever looking into the nest contents.

On 11th September, that is on 23rd day the birds were seen feeding at least one chick in the nest. From this day both the male and the female were feeding the chicks throughout the day.

On 14th September 2006, at 0715 hours I observed an unusual phenomenon. The male landed near the female singing and tried to mate! At 0730 again the cock arrived near the female singing and mated her. As soon as the male dismounted the female, it flew to a perch just below and pecked at her genitals.

After half a minute the female quivered her tail, flew to the nest, fed the chicks, entered the nest and started brooding.

I wonder as to why the male was interested in mating, when the chicks were yet to fledge from the nest?

An accident that reversed the roles of the male and female Sunbirds (*N. zeylonica)*

On 21st September 2006, it rained heavily with storms. The next day in the morning I found the nest lying on the ground. The opening of the nest was towards the ground. The female, which roosted in the nest brooding the chicks, had managed to egress herself from the nest. The chicks were feebly calling “cheek.. cheek”. The parents were frantically searching the nest at its original site, calling and hovering around the branch where the nest was hanging until the previous day.

I tied the nest to another branch about 10 feet up, using rusted binding wires. The male first inspected the nest for about 6 minutes. Then both the parents started feeding the chicks. Soon I noticed that the female had got injured and her left leg was broken and hanging limply. She was not able to perch and hang upside down. She was not able to perform the acrobatics of as a sunbird does in procuring its food. In a reversal of roles, the male from then onwards took the lion’s share in feeding the chicks.

Here are the statistics: In observations of 141 minutes on the day (22nd September 2006) the male’s share of feeding the chicks was 73.33% (n=22) and the female’s share was only 26.66% (n=8). On 26th September 2006, in observations of 120 minutes on the day the male’s share in feeding the chicks was 66.66% (n=12) and the female's share was only 33.33% (n=6). On 27th, in observations of 348 minutes on the day the male's share in feeding the chicks was 59.18% (n=29) and the female's share was only 40.81% (n=20).

Thus as the female was partially incapacitated to feed her chicks, the duty was taken over by the male. The share of female in feeding was always more than that of the male before this accident. For example, on 13th September 2006, eight days before the accident, in observations of 199 minutes the male's share in feeding the chicks was only 26.31% (n=5) and the female's share was 73.68% (n=14). These observations matched with those of Capt. Bates (1931). He has mentioned "When the young were hatched, he (the male) took a really good share in the feeding operations, and at times his visits were almost as frequent as those of his spouse, though as a rule one visit to three (ratio of 25% to 75%) of hers was about his average."

The two chicks fledged successfully on 27th and 28th September 2006, which is 39th and 40th day from the first day of nesting.

This unique incidence proved one thing; birds do have the knack of overcoming adversities!

References:

Ashok Kumar S. (2005): Breeding behaviour of *Nectarinia zeylonica* Newsletter for Birdwatchers Vol.43 No.6 pp.80-82.

Bates, Capt. R.S.P. (1931): Birdlife in India. Bom. Nat. Hist. Soc. Pp. 48-56.

Wesley, H. Daniel (2004): A glimpse of the breeding biology of the Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* (Linnaeus, 1766). Newsletter for Ornithologists. Vol.1 No.1&2 pp.9-10.

PIED MYNA (STURNUS CONTRA) ENTERS MALWA

D.N. MISRARAJ, 203 Pushparatn Pride, 35/2 New Palasia, Indore 452001

Three subspecies of *Sturnus contra* (pied myna) viz. *Sturnus contra contra*, *S. contra sordidus* and *S. contra superciliaris* have been reported to be occurring in the Indian subcontinent (Ali, S., 1941). Of these, the last two have an extremely limited distribution restricted only to two specific small areas bordering Burma. S*turnus contra contra* has a wider distribution, from the far-east Assam to the entire sub-Himalayan region and the Gangeatic Plain. Its full range covers entire Bangladesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, eastern regions of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and almost the whole of Andhra. On the western side, it is limited to a westward bulging line from Ludhiyana to Hydrabad through Hissar, Delhi, Bharatpur, Dholpur, Gwalior, Bhopal, Hoshangabad, Jabalpur and Nagpur (Ali, S. & Ripley, S.D., 1969). This line completely excludes Malwa and Nimar, constituted by the districts of Mandsaur, Ratlam, Jhabua, Dhar, Indore, Dewas, Shajapur, Ujjain, Khargone, Barwani and Burhanpur. In the literature on birds of the subcontinent, mention is found only in Grewal (1993) about its occurrence in western Madhya Pradesh. In my two decades of survey of western Madhya Pradesh that is constituted by Malwa and Nimar, I found this bird entirely absent. Senior-most birdwatcher of this region, Dr. P.T. Thomas, now settled in Bangalore has been in agreement with this observation.

By the close of the last century, stray and unconfirmed reports of sighting this bird in Ujjain started coming. In 2002 two of my students, who teach biology, reported seeing pied mynas in Ujjain. Next year we did come across a few birds on Sirpur tank, Indore. By 2006 the typical call of this bird could be heard in several parts of the townships of Indore, Ujjain, Ratlam, Dhar etc. announcing its entry into Malwa. It has not yet been sighted in the Nimar districts of Khargone, Khandwa, Barwani and Burhanpur.

About 15 years back I had noticed and reported the nesting of this bird on electric poles in Bhopal. Subsequently I have seen nests on similar sites in Delhi, Mathura, Jabalpur, Gondia and Nagpur and I am tempted to conclude that, if available near its favourite feeding place, the garbage dumps, the bird prefers to build its nest on electric poles rather than on trees.

References:

Ali, Salim (1941), The Book of Indian Birds, Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay.

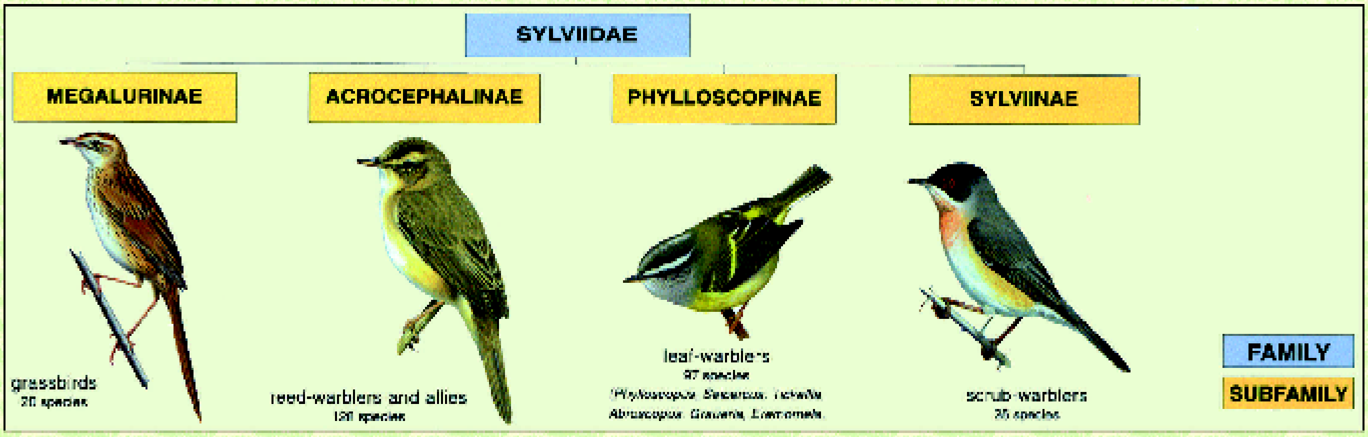
Ali, Salim and Ripley S.D. (1969), Handbook of birds of India and Pakistan, Oxford University Press, Bombay.

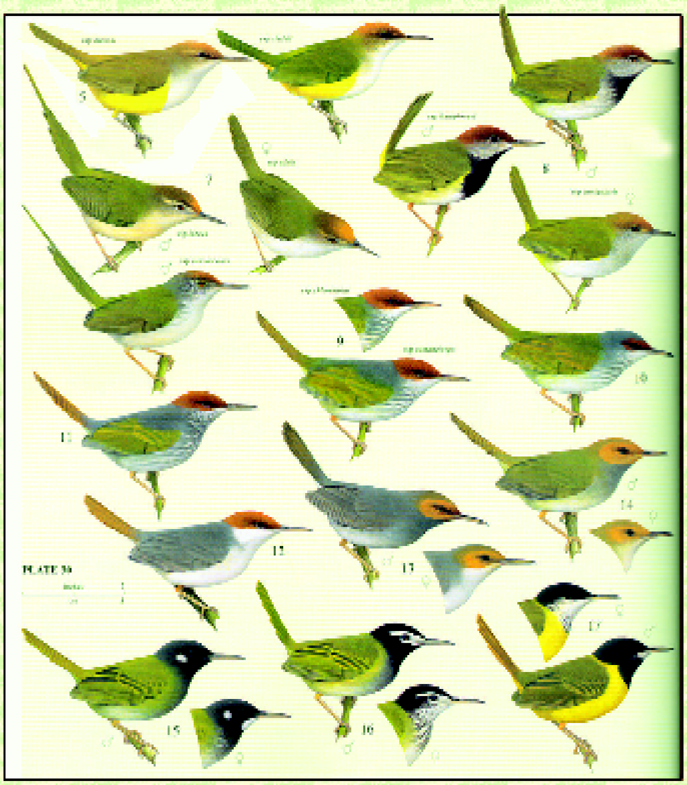
Grewal, Bikram (1993), Birds of India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Guidebook Company Ltd., Hong Kong.

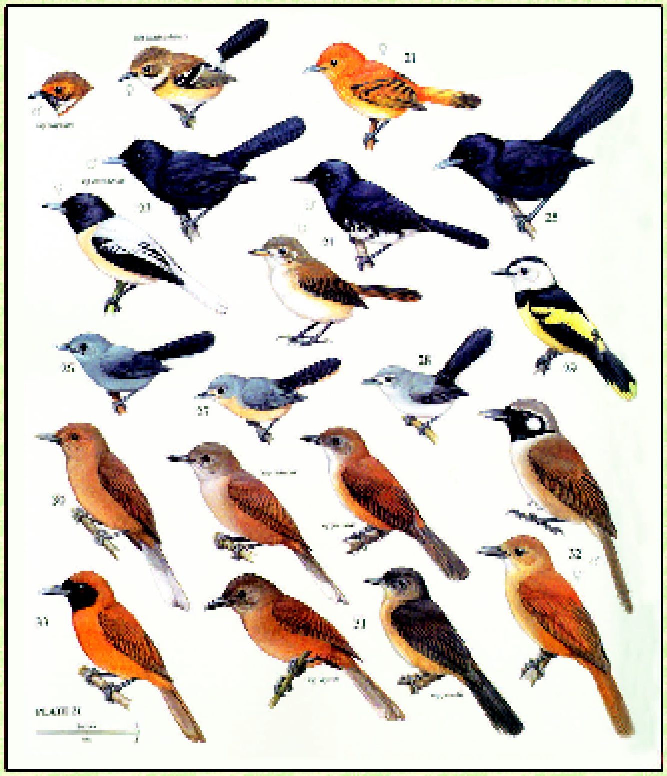
Cover: Photographs and Illustrations reproduced from the **Handbook of the World**, **Volume 11**, ***Old World Flycatchers to Old World Warblers***. To be read with Excerpts and Highlights of the Volume. (Pages 51 to 59)

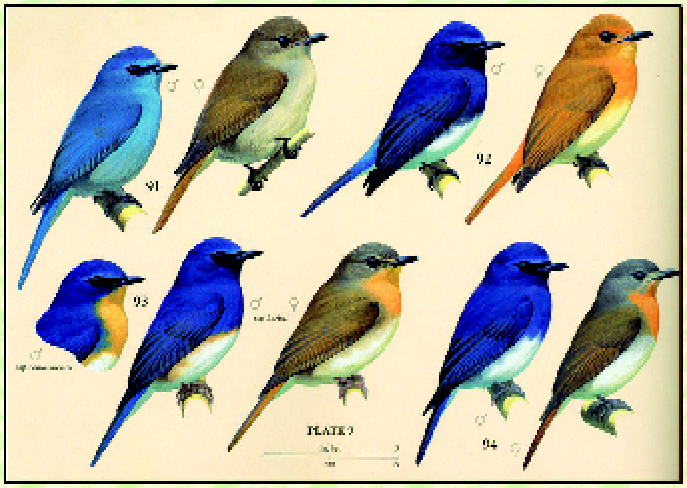
Address for Correspondence :
Newsletter for Birdwatchers
No 10, Sirur Park B Street, Seshadripuram,
Bangalore 560 020, India. Tel. 080 2356 1142, 2346 4682
E-mail : <navbarat@gmail.com>

Printed and Published bi-monthly by S. Sridhar at
Navbharath Enterprises, Seshadripuram, Bangalore - 560 020, India.
For Private Circulation Only.


SYLVIIDAE
MEGALURINAE
ACROCEPHALINAE
PHYLLOSCOPINAE
SYLVIINAE
grassbirds
20 species
reed-warblers and allies
120 species
leaf-warblers
97 species
(Phylloscopus, Seicercus, Tickellia, Abroscopus, Graueria, Eremomela)
scrub-warblers
25 species
FAMILY
SUBFAMILY






91
92
93
94